

George Manville Fenn

"The Powder Monkey"

Chapter One.

"Hi-lo!"

The little boy raised his head with a sudden start.

"Hilli—hi—ho! What cheer?"

The little fellow started to his feet from where he had been sitting upon a sloping bank, and caught at the bars of the gate close by. He said nothing, but stared through the gloom of the autumn evening at the strange man, who now roared out:

"What cheer, I says! What cheer?"

The little fellow made an effort to speak, but only sighed at first, before stammering out:

"Please, sir, I don't know what you mean."

"You don't?" growled the man, fiercely, as he clapped the palm of his left hand upon the front of his waistband, and the back of his right hand level with it behind; then kicking out his right leg behind, he made a kind of hop on his left, as if to shake himself down into his clothes, as he hoisted them up.

"You don't?" he said again, as he stared at the little fellow. "What are you, then? A furrener?"

"No, sir," said the little boy, shrinking; for the man now took a step forward and clapped a big, brown, tarry hand upon his shoulder.

"Then why can't yer understand yer own lingo?"

"I do, sir," said the boy, with a sound like a sob.

"Then why did you say you didn't, and make me think you was a Frenchy?"

"I didn't know what you meant, sir, by 'hilli' something, and 'what cheer.'"

"Why, yer young savage!" cried the man. "Arn't yer never been to school?"

"Yes, sir, and had a tutor."

"A tutor, eh? What may that be? But lookye here, my lad; I arn't a *sir*—on'y a marrineer."

"A what, sir?" said the boy, staring.

"Marrineer—seaman. Fore the mast man, ship now lying off the port o' Torquay. Whatcher doing there?"

"Cry-ying, sir," came for answer, with a piteous sob.

"Cry-hying, you young swab?" roared the man, as if he were speaking through a storm. "Here, sop that up. Father been leathering yer?"

"No, sir."

"No, Jack Jeens!" yelled the man. "*Sir*, indeed! Jack Jeens—that's my name. England is my dwellin' place—leastwise, when I arn't off France and Spain, or in the 'Terranium leathering the French. Now, then, who has been givin' it to you? Mother, p'r'aps, and turned you out of doors?"

"No, sir," sobbed the boy, with a piteous look, in the gathering darkness.

"Yah!" came so savagely that the boy started to run; but the grip upon his shoulder tightened, and he was forced back against the bars of the gate. "Now, just you look here, messmet. You're such a little un that I don't like to hit yer for fear you should break; but don't you haggravate me by talking as if I was a hofficer."

"No, sir; please, sir—" stammered the boy.

"Hark at him!" growled the man, speaking to one of the stone gate-posts; and then, turning to the other, "Is he a hidgit?"

"No, that I'm not!" cried the boy, speaking indignantly now. "I wanted to say that I had no father and no mother."

"Then why didn't you say so at first?" growled the man. "But got no father nor mother?"

"No, s— no, no!" cried the boy.

"You're a horphan, mate?"

"Yes—Jack Jeens, didn't you say you were?"

"Right, boy; and that shows me straight and plain that you ain't a hidgit. Shake hands, mate. I'm just the same as you. I'm a horphan, too, on'y I don't pipe my eye like you do."

The boy held out his hand, which the next moment lay, looking dimly white, in the great, hairy paw which seized it.

"Leave crying to the women, my lad. Now then, what's the matter?"

The tears started to the boy's eyes again and he uttered a kind of gasp as he strove to master the desire to sob aloud, and said in a broken voice:

"I'm tired and cold and hungry."

"Eh? Then why don't you go home?"

"I have no home now," said the little fellow, sadly.

"That's queer agen," said the sailor, in quite a sympathetic tone now. "You're a horphan like me, and now you've got no home. What, nowhere to go and sleep to-night?"

"No—" said the boy, and the word "sir" nearly slipped out again.

"Why, you're quite a ship in distress, messmet, and it seems lucky you've failed in with me. Hungry and out o' water, are yer?"

"Very hungry, please," said the boy; "but I found some water over there, running by the roadside, before it was dark, and I drank some."

"Ah, that's why it came out o' them eyes o' yourn like a shipped wave out o' the scuppers. Well, I got a shot or two yet in the locker, so come along o' me and I'll get yer something to eat, anyhow. Here, hook on to my fin."

The man's tone was so friendly, and he held out his hand in such a kindly way, that the little fellow caught at it eagerly, and with the darkness thickening fast, began to trot beside his new friend as he strode off, but only to totter breathlessly at the end of a few minutes and then stumble, ready to fall but for the strong arm which dragged him up.

"Why, hillo!" cried the man. "What's this here?"

"I—I don't know," said the boy, feebly. "I'm so tired—and my feet hurt—and—and—and I can't go any farther, please. Don't be cross with me, sir; I can't help it—I'm obliged to cry."

His legs sank beneath him as he spoke and doubled so that he naturally came down upon his knees, and raising the hand that was not held, to join the other, the boy seemed in the gloom to be praying for mercy to the big, rough man.

"Why, matey, I didn't know you were on your beam ends like this here," he growled, softly. "Here, I'll help yer. Let me lift yer on to this 'ere bank. That's the way. Steady, now, while I turn round. Give's t'other fin. There you are. Heave ho! and you're up and on my back. Now, then, I'll tow you into port where I'm going, and you an' me'll have a bit o' supper together, and after that—well, look at that now!"

As he spoke the sailor had got the boy up on his shoulders, pig-a-back fashion, and began to tramp steadily along the road, not feeling the light weight, and talking pleasantly to the little fellow all the while, till, in his surprise, he uttered the last words in a low tone, and followed them up by exclaiming:

"Tired out, poor bairn. I'm blessed if he ain't fast asleep!"

The sailor stood in the middle of the road thinking and talking aloud to himself as if he were someone else.

"This here's a pretty set-out, Jack Jeens," he growled softly, so as not to awaken his load. "Here you are, my lad, just finished your holiday, spent half your arnings along with your friends, and give t'other half to yer old mother to help her along till you come back from sea again—bless her old heart! On'y I wish when she kisses yer and says, 'good-bye, and bless you, my dear boy!' she wouldn't cry quite all over yer. But as I was a-saying, Jack, here you're going back quite comfy to join the *Sairy Ann* schooner, lad, with nothing to do but join your ship, when down upon you comes this here boy, tired and hungry, and crying as bad as your old mother, my lad. You didn't want a

boy, Jack, and now you've got him you don't know what to do with him, nor who he is, nor where he's going, nor where he comes from. Strikes me he don't know himself. Take him aboard the *Sairy Ann*, my lad, and show him to the skipper. 'Now, then,' says you, 'here's a boy.' 'So I see,' says the skipper. 'Well, what's to be done with him?' says you, and he turns it over in his mind, and 'fore you know where you are he's settled it all and told you what to do and where to put him.

"That's the way to do it," said Jack Jeens, with a low, soft chuckle. "Poor little bairn! The skipper has got a wife and little uns of his own, and understands these sort o' things. Shouldn't wonder if he finds a new father and mother for him."

Jack's messmates said nothing, for they never knew, though the rough sailor began to carry out his plan, going onward with the boy fast asleep upon his back, too much wearied out to heed where he was going or to think of the troubles which had befallen one so young. For his sleep grew deeper and deeper till the lights of Torquay came into sight round about the port at the bottom of the hill; and he did not stir when Jack, stopping short at the door of a shabby-looking little inn upon the Strand—a place much frequented by seamen—and the boy did not heed Jack Jeen's voice when he cried, "What cheer?" to the landlady, and asked for a room and bed for the night with supper to be ready directly.

The simple supper was soon placed upon the table of the mean-looking room; but the boy could not eat.

"Tired out?" said the landlady, sourly.

"Ay, ay; that's it," said Jack. "Here, missus, I'll carry him up and put him to bed."

And this the rough fellow did, carrying his young companion as carefully as if he were afraid that he would break, and then without attempting to undress him, he laid him down, covered him up, and then went back to have his supper. After which, weary enough himself, and thinking about his work in the early morning, he looked out to where his schooner lay moored to a buoy with a light swinging high in the rigging, and then went up to his room.

The boy was faster than ever, and as Jack Jeens held a guttering tallow candle over the sleeper's face, "Poor little chap," he said, smiling. "Why, if I get tumbling into bed it'll wake him up, and I won't do that. Here, this'll do."

Jack took the candle out of the stick and put it out very untidily by turning it upside down till the flame was choked, and then threw himself down upon the floor by the bedside.

"Quite as soft—bit softer perhaps—than the schooner's deck," he muttered. "Good-night, little un. The skipper'll make it all right for you in the morning, and—Heigh-ho-ha-hum! My word, I am jolly sleepy, and—"

Jack Jeens said no more, but the next instant he gave vent to a snore that ought to have awakened the boy but did not; and he lay sleeping hard till there was something louder than his own snore upon the stairs.

First there was the whispering of voices below; then a rough laugh; then the shuffling and stamping of feet, which ceased upon the landing outside the door, which was roughly tried, and being fastened, kicked in, while a fierce voice cried aloud in tones which made Jack Jeens spring to his feet under the belief that he was at home aboard the schooner and in his bunk.

"Ahoy there! Tumble up! Tumble up! In the King's name!"

Chapter Two.

Jack Jeens and his young companion started up, sitting upon the floor, and both confused and wondering.

"Hillo!" ejaculated Jack.

"What's that?" said the boy, who could not tell where he was, while at that moment the window was pushed up a little and the voice of a man said softly:

"There's a ladder here. Quick, run for it! The pressgang!"

"Eh, what? Where?" growled the sailor, excitedly. "Bring a light? Where's the light?"

He knew the next moment, for the door was burst open with a crash and a party of men headed by an officer in uniform rushed into the room, filling it with light, for three of them bore ship's lanthorns, and Jack found that the warning had come too late, for he was seized by three men before he could even think

of resisting, and held tightly with his back to the wall. "Only one, my lads?" cried the officer.

"Not sure yet, sir," replied one of the men, who ducked down to bring the light of the lanthorn he carried beneath the bed, while another of the party examined the cupboard, and a companion peeped up the chimney.

"No, sir; only one, sir," said a man who seemed to be a warrant officer; "but here's a nipper on the bed."

"I thought there had been more," said the leader. "Now, then, my lad," he continued, to the sailor, "it's of no use to kick against it. How many mates had you with you?"

"Ne'er a one," growled Jack, surlily. "What do you want with me?"

"Oh, you'll see soon enough. Come along. Mind you don't lose him, my lads."

"Never fear, sir," came in chorus, while the boy upon seeing that his new friend was in trouble slipped off the bed, ran to Jack's side, and grasped his hand tightly.

"You can't press me," cried Jack, now growing angry, and, as if obeying an instinct which made him feel it to be his duty to protect the boy, drawing him close to his side.

"Can't we, my lad?" said the officer, laughing. "Why, we have pressed you."

"But I belong to a schooner in the bay," cried Jack.

"You belong to the King now, my lad."

Jack Jeans glanced wildly at the speaker and then at the open window, where a face was seen dimly for a moment or two by the light shed by the lanthorns; and the next moment he would have flung off the men who held his arms to right and left, and rushing to the opening, have sprung out. But somehow at that moment the tight grasp of his young companion had the effect of making him feel that he could not leave the little fellow who had so strongly appealed to his better feelings, and he stood fast.

The next moment the chance was gone, for one of the gang ran to the window, shut it down with a bang, and fastened it securely.

"There, bring them along, my lads," said the leader, and just then the man who seemed to be a warrant officer whispered something.

"Eh? What? No, he's too little."

"Powder monkey, sir; and he'll grow."

"To be sure. Of course," cried the officer; "and it's two instead of one. Bring him along."

"Here, what yer going to do?" cried Jack, excitedly. "You mustn't touch this boy; he's—"

"That'll do!" roared the officer, and at a sign from him a couple of the gang made a dash at the little fellow to separate them; but at the first touch the boy uttered a wild cry and clung tightly to his protector, who made a desperate effort to defend him, shouting the while for the landlady to come and take the little fellow.

But it was all in vain: Jack and his young companion were torn apart, hurried down the stairs and out on to the Strand, and a few minutes later the boy was set at liberty, to spring to Jack's side, panting with excitement as he clung to him tightly; but it was with the water rippling and pattering against the bows of the boat which was being rowed rapidly out of the harbour towards the bay. Not long after, as the coxswain's boat-hook caught a ring, the boat glided against the towering side of a great line of battleship, and the two prisoners were hurried up on deck, and Jack Jeens in spite of all protestations was made one of the crew of *HMS Victory*, and his little companion, the youngest boy on board, without a chance of setting foot ashore again.

For at sunrise the sails were shaken out, and the great man-of-war with its tiers of guns was soon after leading the way down Channel in search of England's enemies, followed by the British Fleet, while the news that the fleet was commanded by Admiral Nelson seemed to Jack Jeens and the little fellow with whom he had become so strangely associated only so many empty words.

Chapter Three.

Jack Jeens sat upon the bottom of an upturned bucket with his elbows resting upon his knees, gazing down at his young companion of the previous night's adventure, who was half sitting, half lying, upon the lower deck of the great ship, close to the open port-hole, through which the morning light shone upon his face as he went on eating a biscuit, through the edge of which his keen pearly-white teeth passed like those of a mouse.

It was light enough close to the boy, but all inward was very gloomy, and every here and there a lanthorn was burning dimly, although it was morning.

There was plenty of noise and bustle going on about the deck where the lanthorns burned, and the trampling of feet, and shouts that sounded like orders came now and then; but the principal sound just there by the port-hole through which the light came was the *crunch, crunch, crunch* of the biscuit.

At last Jack Jeens spoke.

"It caps me," he said. "Seems wonderful. Here you are, just aboard ship for the first time, and 'stead o' being badly and sick, eating away like a reg'lar biscuit nibbler."

"I was so hungry," said the little fellow, with a bright smile.

"Eat away, then," said Jack; "but I say, arn't you frightened?"

"Not now," said the boy. "I was when those sailors came and woke me up."

"Course you would be," said Jack. "Why, it scared me. But arn't you frightened now?"

The boy shook his head and took another bite at the hard biscuit.

"Why arn't you frightened?" said Jack, after a good long stare at the biscuit-nibbler, as he called his companion.

"Because you're here," said the boy.

"Yes, I'm here, o' course," said Jack, staring hard as if puzzled. "I'm a-sitting close to yer; but that don't make no difference because I'm a pressed man."

"You'll take care of me and see that no one hurts me," said the boy, confidently.

"Oh, o' course," said Jack, scratching his head. "That is, while I'm here, but what's going to become of you when I'm gone?"

"Gone?" said the boy, sharply, as he left off eating. "You're not going away to leave me, are you?"

"Well, no," said Jack, grimly. "It's you who are going away to leave me."

"That I sha'n't," cried the boy, quickly. "I'll never go away from you. I like you."

"That's right," said Jack Jeens, grinning with satisfaction; "and of course I like you too, youngster. But they'll be setting you ashore soon, so that you can go back to your folk."

The boy shook his head.

"What do you mean by that?" said the sailor, sharply. "Lookye here, you never told me what your name was, nor where you come from."

The little fellow frowned and looked pained.

"Got a name, haven't you?" said the sailor.

"Yes, of course," cried the boy. "Phil."

"Phil, eh?" said the sailor. "Phil what?"

"Leigh," was the reply.

"Phil Leigh, eh? Hard a-lee. Well, where do you live?"

"At Greyton," said the boy, slowly and sadly. "No, I used to live there, till—till—till—"

"Yes, I know," said Jack, quickly, as he grasped the meaning of the boy's working face. "But why don't you live there now?"

"Because uncle came," said the boy, with a shudder, "and then I—I—You won't take me back, will you?"

"Dunno yet," said Jack, sternly. "Boys arn't got no business to run away from home. Watcher run away for?"

"He used to beat me so."

"Beat you—a little un like you?" cried Jack, with a look of disgust. "What with?"

"Walking stick."

"Thick un?" said Jack, and the boy nodded. "And didn't nobody stop him?"

"Yes," said the little fellow quickly. "Aunt did."

"Who's aunt?" said Jack, sharply.

"Why, my aunt. She said it was a shame."

"Ha! I like her," said Jack, and he rubbed his hands. "But what did he beat you for?"

"He said I was always crying," said the boy, piteously. "But I couldn't help it."

"Course you couldn't," said Jack, softly. "You cried a-cause o' them being took away, didn't you?"

The boy nodded sharply—he did not dare to speak.

"Ha!" sighed Jack Jeens, as he rubbed his hands softly together. "I wish I'd been there. But I say, look here. And so you run away because he whipped you?"

The boy nodded.

"And went on walking till I run again' you?"

"Yes," came like a sigh.

"Well, you see, you'll have to go back."

The little fellow dropped the piece of biscuit he held, and it fell with a rap upon the deck, as he started to his feet, glanced out of the open port-hole, and took a quick step or two towards it, darted off into the darkness of the 'tween decks, the sailor catching a glimpse of him as he passed the light shed by the lanthorns.

"Scared, that's what he is," muttered Jack. "Why, I do believe that in his fright he'd ha' jumped into the water and swum for it

sooner than be sent back. Well, I must find him again; and it don't seem easy in a great ship like this. Poor little chap, he was 'most ready to jump out of his skin!"

Jack took a few steps cautiously in the direction followed by the little fellow, but he had hardly started before the sound of a shrill whistle rang out, and he and some ten more pressed men were ordered on deck to be examined by the first lieutenant and some of the other officers, before being informed that they were now King's men, and ordered to receive their kits, after which they were distributed amongst the crew according to whether they were land or sea men, the latter having little to learn.

Jack uttered a grunt as he learned his destination, which was to be under the order of the captain of one of the big guns on the main deck, and the meaning of that grunt was that he determined to make the best of it. But his grunt sounded deep, because he had little Phil Leigh upon his mind, so he addressed one of the officers, and stated his case.

"Eh? The boy brought aboard with you when you were pressed?"

"Yes, sir," said Jack. "Run away from home, he did. Uncle thrashed him. Young gen'leman he is, and I want you to put him in a boat and set him ashore."

"Oh! do you, my lad?" said the officer, gruffly. "Run away from home, did he?"

"Yes, sir, because—"

"That'll do, my lad; no more talk. If he has run away from home he has run into the very best place to learn how to be a good boy."

"But—"

"That'll do, sir. I've no time to listen to you. We want boys."

"But he's such a little un, sir," pleaded Jack.

"Then we'll feed him well and make him grow big. Where is he?"

"Dunno, sir. He run away again this morning."

"What, again?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ah, well, he can't run far, and we shall find him soon. Set him ashore, eh? Next shore we shall see will be somewhere on the coast of Portugal or Spain, I expect."

The officer said the last words to himself as he tramped away, leaving Jack Jeens to stand scratching his head and muttering.

"Pore little chap!" he said. "They'll make a powder monkey on him? Well, and a fine thing too. Better than being a boy at home with an uncle who gave him the stick for crying after his father and mother who are dead. Here, Phil, messmate, where are yer?" he said softly, and his voice sounded as if somehow he had a soft place in his rough, honest heart. "Where are yer, little un? I want to tell you that you're going to be powder monkey aboard Admiral Lord Nelson's ship."

Chapter Four.

Jack Jeens found himself at last piped down below, swinging his hammock and turning in like the rest, to lie listening to the wash of the waves against the rolling sides of the great man-of-war, whose timbers creaked and groaned, for a stiff breeze had sprung up as the fleet began to run down channel. A rough night at sea did not trouble Jack, but he lay thinking about little Phil and wondering whether he could do any good by getting out of his hammock and trying to find him in the darkness; but he felt nothing but despair as he knew enough about a man-o'-war besides what he had seen during the time he had been on board, to feel sure that if he began to search he would soon be stopped by the marine sentries or by the watch.

"A man can't do as he likes aboard a King's ship," he said to himself dismally, as he lay in the black darkness, "but only let me get this night over, and they may say what they like, I'll go straight to the captain, or to Lord Nelson himself, and ask him to have that little fellow found. Here, what's that?"

He said those last three words half aloud, for he had suddenly felt something cold brush across his face.

"That you, Jack?" came in a soft whisper.

"Yes. That you, little messmet? Hooroar! Give's your fin."

"Promise me you won't send me home, Jack, and I will."

"Send you home, messmet!" growled the rough sailor, whose voice trembled with emotion. "Why, o' course I won't! You're to stay aboard, and be a powder monkey. My word! Your hands are like ice! Where have you been all day?"

"Down in the dark, and it was so cold," said the little fellow, shivering. "But you won't send me back, Jack? I can't—I can't go."

"Send yer back? Not me!" growled the sailor. "On'y too glad to get yer again. Don't I tell yer that you're one o' the King's men now, and are going to stop? My word, you are cold! Here, heave ho! That's got you! You snuggle up here alongside me. King's man! Why, you're not much bigger than a frog, and just as cold. My hammock feel warm?"

"Oh, so warm—so warm, Jack!" came in a whisper, as two little hands were passed round the rough fellow's neck.

"That's right, little un. But are you hungry?"

"No, not very; only cold and tired, Jack. But I don't mind now you're not going to send me home. Oh, Jack, I do feel so happy and comfortable!"

"That's right, but I say, little un, it's making you cry again. That don't seem so very happy, do it?"

"Yes, it's because I'm so very, very happy, Jack; but don't speak to me for a bit."

"Right, but what's the matter? You're not going to get out again, are you?"

"No, but don't speak, please," whispered the little fellow. "I'm afraid some of the other men will hear."

Jack Jeens, the rough sailor, drew a deep breath, as he held on to Phil's jacket to make sure that he did not fall out, as he struggled up at the side of the hammock; and then for some little time he did not stir, while the huge vessel rolled and creaked and groaned, through which sounds came the heavy breathing of the men swinging in their hammocks.

But at last the future powder monkey crept softly back into his old place and passed his arms round the rough sailor's neck,

and a curious thrill of satisfaction ran straight to Jack Jeens' heart as he felt two little lips press his cheek, and heard a pleasant, soft voice whisper:

"Good-night, Jack. God bless you!"

It was not many minutes afterwards, and while the light from the swinging lanthorn close up to the companion ladder by the marine sentry had turned so dim that the man had opened the half transparent door to snuff the candle within, that Jack Jeens, whose eyes in the gloom felt a little moist, muttered to himself.

"He said 'good-night. God bless you, Jack!' he did. And on'y think of it—him amongst all these rough chaps a-sleeping here in the dark—kneels up in my hammock, he did, poor little chap, and says his prayers!"

Chapter Five.

Phil sprang out of the hammock at the first sound of a whistle, looking rested and quite content, as he readily answered Jack's question about sleeping well.

Then followed other questions put by half-awake sailors as to who he was and how he came there—questions which began to trouble the little fellow, till Jack Jeens came to his help.

"Who is he?" cried the big bluff sailor. "Why, he's my boy. He was pressed along with me, and he's going to be a powder monkey."

"Rather a little un, eh?" said one joker. "Why, youngster, you'll do to get in and sponge out the guns, only you must mind and not get stuck in the touch-holes."

But Phil's appearance was enough to make all the men his friends, and almost made Jack their enemy, for a strange kind of jealousy sprang up as the crew made efforts to entice the little fellow away from his companion. But the ill feeling soon died out, for though Phil had a smile and a bright look for everyone, Jack Jeens was his great attraction, and he was never happier than when he was at the big, rough fellow's side.

The novelty of such a little fellow becoming one of the crew soon died out, and in a few days he was so much at home, that

the men treated him as one of themselves, while the officers soon took his presence as a matter of course, and had a nod or a smile for the active little fellow who had become the pet of the ship.

"Why, you've quite put the tabby Tom cat's nose out of joint," said Jack one day, with a grin. "Has he scratted you yet?"

"No, of course not," cried Phil. "He follows me wherever I go."

"Humph!" grunted Jack. "Everybody and everything seems to like you, old chap."

Phil said nothing, but he thought a good deal, knowing only too well as he did that his friend Jack was not right. For there were several other boys on board who, seeing the favour in which the little new-comer stood, were not long in trying to make his young life a burden. All far bigger and stronger, they soon began to persecute him when they found a chance, one of their favourite plans being to, as they called it, "chivvy him" and hunt him about the vessel.

Soon after dawn one morning Phil had crept on deck to stand looking over the bulwark through the soft grey light at the scattered vessels sailing slowly along, when all at once a faint *whish* caught his ear, and turning sharply he saw one of his persecutors creeping cautiously towards him, followed by half-a-dozen more, while a couple had crossed the deck and were ready to cut him off if he attempted to retreat in that direction.

Phil glanced towards the forecastle hatch, but there was a boy rising from the square opening, and he turned to look aft, but only to see that other lads were waiting there. For the enemy had taken steps to cut him off in every direction, and the little fellow looked wildly round for a way of escape, and then made a rush to pass through his tormentors, who cut him off at once and with a cry of delight dashed in.

It was all very quickly done; first one and then another of the lads nearly had him, but active as a monkey that has no dealings with powder, Phil dodged, feinted, and dodged again, brushing by the foremost of his pursuers, making for the starboard bulwark, and reaching the foremast shrouds before the first boy could recover himself.

The last was after him, though, directly, but too late; for with a bound Phil had sprung up, caught at the nearest rope, swung himself on to the rail, and then begun swarming up the rigging,

a mere morsel of a fellow, as he dragged himself up from ratline to ratline, mounting higher and higher towards the foretop.

Sure of him now, the boys uttered a low cry of delight, and while two made for the starboard shrouds to follow him, a couple more made for the larboard, or port, as they call them now, while the rest gathered below.

"Take a turn round him with the halyards!" whispered one boy, from the deck, "and then send him down to us."

Phil heard, and climbed on breathlessly, looking up the while at the top and thinking that if his enemies followed him there he could climb higher.

The fore top was reached, but this proved no sanctuary, and Phil had to climb higher still, for one boy in particular, the most active and daring of the party, followed fast and with such good effect, that to Phil's horror just before he reached the top gallant cross-trees, his pursuer was so close behind that he made a dash at his quarry's ankle, and grasped it; and in his horror Phil made a spring which took him out of his enemy's reach and proved disastrous.

For the boy had thrown so much energy into his action that as Phil's ankle glided through his hand, he failed to clutch the ratline beneath, swung round, and unable to get a fresh hold, began to fall from rope to yard, to rope again, and then came heavily on the fore yard, which partially broke his fall, but after a moment or two he came down heavily upon the deck, making his companions there scatter and then make for the forecandle hatch, while those aloft scuttled down as hard as they could.

As for Phil, white with horror, and feeling strongly that he was the cause of the accident, he clung to the shrouds, looking wildly down for a few moments, before seizing the halyards and sliding gradually down to reach the fallen boy lying alone, and began to feel him all over in silence, before his hand came in contact with the insensible lad's leg in such a way that the little fellow uttered a shriek of horror which brought the men of the watch to his side.

Phil turned sick as he stood there listening to what was said; but he fought it back and walked with them as they raised the insensible boy from the deck and bore him to the cockpit, where the surgeon was soon busy setting and bandaging, and talking sourly the while in his ill-humour at being roused from his morning's sleep.

His words consisted of scoldings and questionings.

"You young dog," he said to Phil, who was the only boy allowed to be present. "Skylarking in the rigging before breakfast! What could you expect? Well, my young shrimp, you have the satisfaction of knowing that you've broken your companion's leg, and you'll have to be his nurse. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," said Phil; "but he won't die, will he?"

"Not if I know it, boy. Ah, he's coming-to now."

For the injured lad opened his eyes, to stare about him, trying to understand what it all meant, and grinning as he saw Phil.

"I say," he whispered, "I caught you!"

"That you didn't!" said Phil, indignantly.

"Well, nearly. But what's the matter with my leg?"

"Broke," said Phil, in a whisper.

"That all?" said the boy, coolly. "Well, then, I sha'n't be able to walk."

"No," said Phil, in a hurried whisper. "You're to be in hospital, and he says I'm to be your nurse."

"Who? The doctor?"

"Yes, sir," said that individual, sharply. "Your right leg's broken just below the knee, and you may think yourself very lucky it wasn't your neck."

Phil turned upon him an indignant look which made the doctor stare.

"Be a warning to you both not to play such monkey tricks again," he added, sourly. "There, little one, stop with him, and I'll tell one of the men to bring you some breakfast here."

Chapter Six.

That mishap and the boy's illness worked a complete change. His companions were not allowed to come to what was called

the sick bay, but somehow they soon came to know that Phil had been appointed nurse, and that he was constant in his attendance, and doing everything he could to help the sufferer. Possibly they heard a good deal from Jack Jeens, who did manage to steal a few minutes with Phil once a day. So did the ship's boys whenever Phil showed himself on deck. He tried to avoid them at first, but they cut him off, and to his surprise instead of plying him with blows they wanted to shake hands, while ever after they were the best of friends.

"Why is it?" Phil asked Jack Jeens, who laughed, and said he supposed it was because he tended the injured lad so well.

But Phil found that there was other work for him besides nursing a boy with a broken leg, for at certain times he was called up on deck when the men were working the guns, and he had to learn what was required from him in connection with the great gun to which Jack Jeens belonged, and in his quick way Phil soon did what was required, and that was, to run down to the magazine and fetch a flannel bag that seemed to be full of sand up on deck ready for the crew of the gun to push into the mouth of the gun, where it was rammed down with a long rod, before a big shot was taken out of the rack close by, and rammed down the gun in turn, which was then fired.

It was all new to Phil, and he saw neither harm nor danger in it. It was nothing to him but going below to fetch that flannel bag, and he was in profound ignorance of the fact that if it went near a light he would be blown to pieces, while he could not have had a more dangerous task than that of the powder monkey who fetched up the charges from the magazine, where if a spark should fall the vessel would be blown to atoms and sunk.

Phil was not afraid, for he could not see the danger, and he laughed and liked to run up and down from the powder magazine to the main deck, because the big bluff men always laughed and said pleasant things to him. He was not afraid either on that day when Jack Jeens looked very serious and sponged his face for him over a bucket of water.

"Why, you're as black as a sweep with the powder," said Jack. "I say, didn't you feel frightened when the guns roared?"

"No," said Phil; "I only felt as if I should like to put my fingers in my ears. That gun did make a noise."

Just at that moment a little serious-looking officer in uniform, with only one eye and one arm, stopped short, took off his

cocked hat, and after putting it on again, laid the telescope he carried upon Phil's shoulder.

"Why, you're the little fellow they call Phil, aren't you?" he said.

Phil nodded shortly.

"You're the little powder monkey, they tell me."

"Yes," said Phil, looking at the little man wonderingly.

"And you've been bravely nursing the boy who broke his leg, eh?"

"Oh, it isn't brave," said Phil, laughing and showing his white teeth. "His leg hurts him very badly sometimes, and he likes me to read to him then and tell him stories."

"Oh," said the officer; "then you read to him and tell him stories?"

"Yes," said Phil, "but I sha'n't read half so well as I should like; but I am trying very hard."

"To be sure," said the little officer. "You are the sort of boy who would. And you can tell stories?"

"Yes, three—I mean four; and Tom Dodds likes to hear them all over and over again."

"Bravo!" said the little officer, tapping Phil on the shoulder with the telescope. "There, be a good boy, and you'll get on and be something better than a powder monkey one of these days."

"Who's that?" said Phil, as the little man walked forward and ascended the companion ladder. "I like him, Jack, almost as much as I do you."

"And so you ought," said Jack, gruffly, "for that's our admiral, Lord Nelson, the greatest man in the world."

Chapter Seven.

It was not long after that Phil was between decks, talking to his new friend, the crippled boy, whose face always expanded into a grin of satisfaction when his nurse appeared.

"Here, I wanted you," he cried. "I've got some news. The doctor told me—"

"Did he say that you might soon try to walk?" cried Phil, eagerly.

"No; he said that my leg was going on well, but I was not to try to use it for a long time yet. He told me that we are going to have a big fight with the French. Isn't it a bother? For I sha'n't be able to go to my gun."

"Jack Jeens said he didn't think we should have a fight," replied Phil.

"He doesn't know anything about it," said the lame boy, impatiently. "But I say, I shall be obliged to stop below; you might come and stop with me."

"Jack said I should be sent below if there was a fight, so I will."

"That's right," said the boy, with a sigh of relief. "I didn't want for you to see it and me stop below."

Phil looked at him in rather a puzzled way, for he did not know whether he was disappointed or pleased—whether he would like to see the battle or prefer to go below.

But he was not to choose, and a few days later he was quite forgotten in the excitement of the great incident. For he had been trained to certain duties in connection with one of the guns, and when the orders were given for the different crews to take their places, he ran to his naturally enough, perfectly ignorant of the fact that the British Fleet was in "Trafalgar's Bay," with the Frenchmen before them, while the British sailors, wild with excitement, were eagerly awaiting the orders that should set hundreds of guns bellowing like thunder as they poured their broadsides of shot into the enemy's sides.

All that little Phil knew was that his ears were deafened by the roar, his throat throbbing and suffering from the dense clouds of smoke which darkened the sky, and that he could hardly see Jack Jeens, who, like the rest of the crew, was stripped to the waist, as he helped to load their gun, which grew hotter and hotter, and finally leapt from the deck at every discharge.

He could only see dimly for the sulphurous mist before his eyes, but there was Jack Jeens close at hand, always watching him anxiously and ready to make a sign to him from time to

time—a sign which meant “More powder,” and sent him running to the hatch-way and down to the magazine, from which he soon returned, heedless of the fact that if he stopped near a patch of burning tinder or wood the bag of flannel which he carried might explode in his hand.

It was all wild noise and confusion, in the midst of which Phil, blackened and besmirched by the smoke and powder amongst which he moved, had eyes for nothing but his friend, who divided his time between toiling at the gun to which he was attached and watching his little *protégé*, trembling for his safety when he had gone towards the opening in the deck through which he had to descend, and only breathing freely again when he saw the boy come panting back with his charge. Like the rest of the crew, Jack Jeans knew nothing of how the battle went. He had his duty to do, and he did it, till all at once, just as he turned his head aside to give Phil a welcoming look through the gloom, he was conscious of the tremendous shock of a sickening blow.

Then all was blank for a time, till the darkness by which he was surrounded opened a little and he found himself lying upon the deck, with Phil looking horrified as he knelt beside him holding a tin of water to his lips.

Poor Jack could not hear what Phil said for the roaring of the guns, but he could read the little fellow’s lips as he pressed him to drink, and sick to the heart and suffering from the terrible wound which had struck him down, he raised his hand to the tin to steady it and drink, but only to see it fall upon the deck, a splinter having struck it from the boy’s hand.

Jack’s wild eyes seemed to say, Are you hurt? But he too made no sound, for at that moment a little group assembled upon the deck, opened out, and both he and Phil saw the figure of their great commander being borne towards them on his way to the spot where he breathed his last. His eyes were open and he was looking wildly round as if in search of something to guide him as to the progress of the great battle, when all at once they rested upon the childlike face of Phil, as the boy knelt beside his wounded and bleeding friend.

A change came over Nelson’s face; the wildly anxious look died out, and as his eyes met those of the boy he smiled at him sadly, and Phil rose quickly to his feet, carried away by the childlike feeling of pity for the dying hero.

It was almost momentary. Then the little group closed in again and passed along the deck, while with the horror and confusion increasing once more, Phil found himself following Jack Jeens, who was being carried below to where the surgeon and his helpmates were busy over their terrible task, and all that the powder monkey saw more of the Battle of Trafalgar was a dim lanthorn swinging by a hammock in which lay poor Jack Jeens, badly wounded, but with energy enough left to smile at his nurse, who was watching by his side.

It was the next morning when, after a stupor-like sleep, Jack opened his eyes, which brightened a little as he saw who was still with him.

"Are you better, Jack?" whispered Phil, anxiously.

"Lots, boy," was the reply; "only I want to know. Tell me—who won? No, don't, if it was the French."

"No, it wasn't them," was the quick reply. "We beat, and everyone says it is a great—great—yes, victory—that's it."

"Hoo-roar!" came in a faint whisper from Jack Jeens' lips, and a smile of thankfulness lit up his face for a few moments.

But for a few moments only, for like a shadow came the recollection of something he had seen before he had fainted away from loss of blood.

He lay for a while gazing at Phil as if afraid to speak. Then summoning up his courage he whispered:

"Phil, boy, when I was shot down and you held the water for me to drink, did I dream something?"

Phil gazed back in his eyes, but did not speak, for he with the recollection fresh upon him knew what his poor messmate meant.

And so they rested for a few moments looking in each other's eyes, till Jack's slowly closed, and he uttered a low groan.

"I hoped it was a dream," he said, "and all fancy. But tell me now, Phil, boy; is it true?"

"Yes," said the little fellow, softly, and there was a choking sound in his fresh young voice as he whispered the words in the wounded sailor's ear: "Yes; Lord Nelson is dead."

Chapter Eight.

It was about a fortnight after the *Victory* had returned to port, that a lady in deep mourning came off in a shore boat asking for the captain, but in his absence having to see the first lieutenant instead.

This officer listened to her rather impatiently at first; but after a minute or two he began to take a good deal of interest in the statement she made.

"Oh, yes," he said, at last; "we have such a boy on board. He came with one of the men who were pressed; but it was just at a time when everyone's attention was taken up by our sailing. There was some talk of the little fellow having been left an orphan and then being so ill-used that he ran away. Was this so, madam?"

"There is, I am sorry to say, a good deal of truth in it, for though well-meaning, my brother was so stern and harsh that the poor little fellow was afraid of him, and took that very foolish step. It was long enough before I was able to trace him, and found the woman who kept the inn from which he was taken."

"And now, madam," said the first lieutenant, "I presume that your visit means that you have come to claim the boy?"

"Oh, yes," cried the lady, eagerly. "He is my little nephew, my dear dead brother's child."

"Exactly; but he is quite happy and settled down with our men, and I don't know that we should be justified in giving him up."

"You don't mean," cried the lady, indignantly, "that you would keep him here to become a common sailor?"

"I beg your pardon, madam," said the officer, stiffly, "but I was not aware that there was anything common about a sailor."

"Oh, I did not mean that," said the lady, flushing.

"And what is more, I feel sure that our captain would not allow our little powder monkey—"

"Powder monkey!" cried the lady, aghast.

"Only a sailor's playful term, madam," said the lieutenant. "I say our captain would not give up our brave little fellow to go back to a life of ill-treatment."

"He would come back to no ill-treatment," cried the lady, with the tears brimming in her eyes. "I love my dead brother's son. He would be with me, as his father expressly desired in his will. My other brother would have nothing whatever to do with him. Pray, pray let me see the little fellow, and I can prove to you that he would be happy."

"Oh, he is no prisoner, madam," said the lieutenant. "Will you come with me? You will find him doing duty in what we term the sick bay—the infirmary—where are several of our wounded men."

The lady uttered a faint sob, and looking more and more troubled, suffered herself to be led to where poor Jack Jeens, looking very white and thin, lay back close to an open port-hole, listening to something Phil was reading from a book.

Unseen at first, the visitor stopped short, gazing wonderingly at her little nephew neatly rigged up in nautical style, bending over the book he held, and evidently enjoying his task.

"Phil!" whispered the lady; but the boy did not look up, only went on reading.

But Jack Jeens heard, and he started where he lay, guessed the object of the visit, and stretched out a hand to seize the boy.

"I'm not tired, Jack," cried Phil. "I can go on reading for—O, Auntie!" he shouted joyously, and dropping the book as he sprang up, he bounded into the lady's arms, to begin kissing her passionately again and again.

"Phil—my darling!" she sobbed. "Have I found you again?"

"Yes, Auntie dear," cried the little fellow, "but—" He struggled from her embrace and darted behind Jack Jeens, gazing wildly around.

"Is Uncle there?" he whispered, hoarsely.

"No, my boy; he has gone, and you will not see him again."

"Ah," cried Phil; "and have you come to fetch me home?"

"My darling, yes," cried the visitor, and as the boy sprang to her arms again she held him tightly to her breast and turned proudly upon the lieutenant. "Now, sir," she cried, "do you think he will be ill-used?"

"I am satisfied, madam," said the officer, smiling. "So, then, we are to lose our little powder monkey? You are going away, then, sir?"

"Yes," cried the boy, eagerly; "along with Auntie. No," he cried, excitedly—"no! I can't go and leave poor Jack. Auntie, dear, oh, he has been so good to me, you don't know. No, I can't come away now. Besides, they wouldn't let me come. I'm a sailor, serving the King. But I'll come sometimes and see you."

"O, Phil, my darling!" sobbed his aunt.

"You don't know what he has done for me. No, Jack, I won't go away now you're so weak and ill."

"Weak—ill—with wounds?" cried Phil's aunt eagerly, as she turned to the lieutenant.

"Yes, madam; one of our brave seamen, badly wounded at Trafalgar."

"But ought he not to be ashore where he could be properly nursed?" cried Phil's aunt.

"I nurse him," said Phil, proudly, "and feed him too. He can't use his arms, Auntie."

"Then why not bring him home, Phil, dear, where he could be well nursed back to health, and then—"

That was the way it was settled, for an hour later Jack Jeens was being carefully slung down into the gig and then rowed ashore, while as Phil, after his aunt had taken her place, slid down one of the falls to join them, pretty well the whole crew was on deck to cheer the powder monkey till he was out of sight.

Years passed before Phil stepped on board a King's ship again, and then it was in the uniform of a midddy—the midddy of one of the smartest frigates in the Navy.

"Yes, Master Phil, sir, the very smartest frigate in the service, and I'm glad to welcome you aboard, and so's all the crew. I'm

bo'sun, sir, and I've told all the lads how you and me served the King under Admiral Lord Nelson at *Traffle-gar*."
